

CAREER IN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Student Environmental Health Officer (September 2014)

If you are interested in the environment and health this is the job for you. Aberdeenshire Council is looking for an enthusiastic individual with a genuine concern for the environment and the health and wellbeing of the public and communities in Aberdeenshire.

What is Environmental Health?

Environmental Health is that area of public health activity which strives to improve, protect and maintain health and well being through action on the physical environment and life circumstances.

For well over 100 years in Scotland, Environmental Health Officers (EHO's) and their predecessors have been employed to look after the health of the public.

In Scotland, the seven principal subjects within Environmental Health are:

- Food Safety
- Food Standards
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Public Health
- Waste Management
- Built Environment, and
- Pollution Control.



What do EHOs do?



EHOs are primarily concerned with protecting the public from the harmful exposures they may encounter in the environment, and with improving its health. EHOs act as advisers, educators and enforcers, carry out site visits and give assistance to individual householders, businesses, managers and workers. In certain circumstances, they take enforcement action to ensure compliance with legislation designed to protect the health of the public.

Some EHOs work in the private sector advising businesses of their legal duties. Many EHOs pursue a general career and deal with a wide range of functions. An increasing number become specialists in specific areas of Environmental Health. Wherever they work, EHOs have the same goal - to improve and protect public health.

Is a career in Environmental Health right for me?

The academic knowledge, technical skills and professional competencies needed to qualify as an EHO will be acquired at university and during structured practical training. However, your attitude and outlook on life are just as important! EHOs are public health advocates and educators and need to be broad-minded, approachable, flexible and persuasive.

The career is suitable for a person who:-

- wishes to contribute to the protection and improvement of public health in Scotland
- cares enough about the environment and its effect on health to want to do something about it
- is a good communicator and enjoys meeting and working with people from all educational, social and cultural backgrounds
- is sympathetic to the views of others and is prepared to listen to problems, work in a team, and manage projects alone
- is able to analyse and assess situations in real time and to be decisive in their actions
- works in collaboration with others to achieve strategic goals
- pays attention to detail and accuracy, and
- is keen to learn more and to develop their professional competence.

How do I become an EHO?

To qualify as an EHO in Scotland requires academic study and structured practical training:

Academic study

You would be required to gain a BSc (Hons) in Environmental Health at the University of West of Scotland. Entrance requirements are:

SQA Highers: BBCC including 2 science based subjects plus Standard Grade English and Maths. Biology and Chemistry would be preferred at Higher Grade.

GCE A- Levels: CCC including 1 science based subject, preferably Biology or Chemistry plus GCSE English and Maths.

Note: Successful completion of an Access to Science course would lead to Year 1 entry.

Practical training

Structured practical training must also be undertaken. The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) Scheme of Practical Training consists of a minimum of 48 weeks experiential learning placement with a local authority. Aberdeenshire Council Environmental Health Service will provide the required training. A Training Officer will be assigned to the Student EHO.



You will undertake training in vacation periods throughout the course of academic study (integrated training), largely during the summer.

You will be registered with REHIS at the commencement of your practical training. On registering with REHIS, you will be given a copy of the current Scheme of Practical Training and Aberdeenshire Council will produce a training plan to cover your training.

You will be required to keep a training record, (including a portfolio of evidence) detailing the practical work carried out, its relationship to the scheme and indicating its connection to achieving a particular skill or competence. Aberdeenshire Council will undertake regular assessments of your progress during your training.

After obtaining the BSc (Hons) in Environmental Health degree and completing the practical training you will require to pass the Professional Examination which assesses your professional competence in each of the programme areas.

On passing the Professional Examination, you will be awarded the REHIS Diploma in Environmental Health the qualification required to become an Environmental Health Officer.

A salary is paid for the time you work with the Council during your training. Your salary rises once you obtain your degree and again on gaining the REHIS Diploma in Environmental Health. Students currently commence on £7.94 per hour, rising to £13.00 when obtaining their degree, and to £16.54 when obtaining professional qualification.

Student EHOs have been employed by Aberdeenshire Council and the previous District Councils since 1975 and we have a history of producing well trained officers with a number achieving Best Student.

A job profile for a Student Environmental Health Officer with Aberdeenshire Council is attached, giving you a flavour of the job.

Arrangements can be made for you to visit the department and see the work of an EHO first hand. For further information contact:

Graham Robertson (Team Manager and Student Training Officer)

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or

David Cooper, Service Manager

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Profile of an Environmental Health Officer: Louise Cunningham

I began my career as a Student Environmental Health Officer with Aberdeenshire Council in June 2008 between my second and third year at University. I graduated in 2010, passing my professional exams the same year and have worked in Peterhead ever since.

I always had an interest in science, enjoyed helping people and had an interest in general health/medicine. I also knew I didn't want to be stuck in the same office all day every day staring at a computer. So whilst researching University Degrees, Environmental Health seemed like a good choice and after a weeks work experience before starting University, I knew it was the course for me!

I achieved a 2:1 BSc (Hons) in Environmental Health – having a summer placement related to my degree really helped make sense of why I was learning certain things at University. University was predominantly classroom based learning including group projects, report writing and presentations. We also carried out a number of site visits, for example to a private water supply, food businesses and housing visits.

Whilst on my summer placements I shadowed a number of different officers within Environmental Health, other Council departments and agencies such as Scottish

Environment Protection Agency, and NHS Grampian, all of which created entries towards my training portfolio and gave me valuable experience to help prepare for my professional exams.

Each working day is varied and can consist of a wide range of things. The morning may involve collecting food samples to be sent off to the lab for examination before heading to the port to carry out a Ship Sanitation Inspection of one of the many off-shore supply vessels that work out of Peterhead. The afternoon may then be an investigation of a noise complaint, house condition inspection or to discuss a planning application..... before finishing off with an inspection of a local food business - just like on the TV.

Although the majority of our work is planned we still need to be prepared to respond to emergencies such as accidents in a workplace, food poisoning outbreaks, water supply failures and even oil spills. We also get involved in community events such as Taste of Grampian, the New Deer show and various Galas and Fun Days.

You name it, we do it, or we get asked about it! I really don't think you could find a more varied interesting job out there, even if I am biased.